

In Balance Together

Guide to the Activities



The activities in this guide all feature in the online training programme (<https://nthive.org.uk/in-balance-together>). They are designed to help the children you care for become more regulated and manage their emotions. The activities should be good fun to do and can help to build and strengthen your relationship.

Sensory Based Activities to support Regulation

Activity 1

Building a Calm Space to help to reduce big Emotions

Resources needed: A couple of blankets over an armchair or a space in between two chairs. Hot water bottle with a furry cover, stretchy toys, fidgets, cuddly toys, putty.

Why this activity helps: Helps to give them a space to wind down from the day and also if used regularly throughout the day, it helps to prevent bigger escalations in emotions later on.



Activity 2

Weighted hot water bottle

Resources needed: Fleecy Hot Water Bottle

Why this activity helps: Water bottle can be filled with hot water or sand and sealed to add weight. Adding weight and/or heat is/are both soothing and calming to the young person. Touch is also a very nurturing and comforting.



Activity 3

Hanging upside down over an armchair

Resources needed: an armchair and stretchy resistance band

Why this activity helps: Hanging or inverting provides grounding sensory input. If you add too much movement to this it can have the opposite effect.



Activity 4

Leg lift whilst lying over a Gym Ball

Resources needed: a gym ball or peanut roll. Can do this over a big cushion or on the floor.

Why this activity helps: Holding static sustained positions helps to take greater control over breathing rate and helps to calm and regulate when the mind and body are in a heightened state.



Activity 5

Coloured Circle Bean Bag Toss

Resources needed: Coloured card or pictures and a couple of bean bags or could improvise with a couple of socks filled with lentils/ dried peas. 2 people.

Why this activity helps: Helps to build relationships and enjoyment after a period of upset and distress.



Activity 6

Extension of the Body with Weights

Resources needed: gym ball (round or peanut), can be done over a large cushion or lying on the floor. Use a couple of 1-2 kilo weights. Raise each arm separately with a weight in each hand, hold for up to 10 seconds whilst taking long breaths.

Why this activity helps: Helps young person to reduce high arousal through slow, regular, sustained movement. Helps to calm the nervous system. Can be used with older young people as similar to 'exercise'.



Activity 7

Bridge over Ball

Resources needed: A gym ball or a pile of cushions.
Weighted hot water bottle (optional)

Why this activity helps: If using a ball encourage the young person to rock through hands and then feet, slowly pushing from the floor using hands and feet. The rhythm of rocking will help to soothe the neurological system.



Activity 8

Wall Ball Squash

Resources needed: Gym Ball and resistance band (optional)

Why this activity helps: Another example of sustained position to calm the body through the position and breath. Try to hold the position in a squat and for added intensity hold hands out and clasp in front. You can also add a resistance band above the knees for more intensity.



Activity 9

Resistance Band Tug of War

Resources needed: a resistance band.

Why this activity helps: Helps to provide calm input to body in a playful way with a carer. Activities that involve a 'pull' action increase the demand on the body providing lots of input to the muscle joints.



Activity 10

Plank version 3

A variation on the standard plank and easier for first time attempts. Raise bottom in air (as high as you can reach) and go on tip toes. Hands can be clasped together and balance through forearms.

Resources needed: *Just yourself.*

Why this activity helps: Holding a sustained position is effortful and provides lots of feedback to the brain through the muscle joints which helps to calm the mind and body. It also regulates breathing patterns.



Activity 11

Four Point Kneeling Balancing Game

Hold a soft toy on you back and try and stop it from falling off as you crawl around the room. See how long you can keep it in this position.

Resources needed: *Hot water bottle as before*

Why this activity helps: As well as experiencing big emotions it can be difficult to slow the body down. This is an activity that helps to do just that and is also playful and relies on cooperation with a carer to help.



Activity 12

Walk up the Wall into a Handstand

Resources needed: *Only you!*

Why this activity helps: Make sure you have lots of space. Only raise feet up the wall a foot or so to start. This is similar to the plank. Like with that move, it also provides some vestibular input (these sense organs are found in the inner ear and help with balance and motion). With less movement they help to calm and regulate the body.



Activity 13

Laser String Maze

Resources needed: *Some red string and furniture*

Why this activity helps: Helps to change emotion through fun based activity and also repair the relationship with a carer. Must be done in pairs as this is half the fun!



Theraplay® Based Activities to Support Regulation and Relationship Building

Try to find 10 minutes where you can put together a few activities in a short sequence and enjoy some connected time together in play.

This will help your child feel safe, have fun and regulate their emotions.

Structure Activities

Structure is about making the world predictable and organised and includes organising a safe feeling environment. It benefits children who are overactive, undirected, overstimulated or need to feel high levels of control.

Engagement Activities

Engagement is about helping a child to feel safe internally and to regulate their inner emotions. It's about playfulness and spontaneous joy. It benefits children who are withdrawn, avoidant of contact or too rigidly structured.

Nurture Activities

Nurture is about feeling worthy of love, feeling reduced stress and a sense of calm. It benefits children who are overactive, aggressive or try to take on an adult role.

Challenge Activities

Challenge is about enabling children to feel competent, to develop confidence and a sense that they can impact on the world around them, the feeling that they can achieve things. It benefits children who are withdrawn, timid or rigid.

Activity 1

Entering the Room

Try different ways of coming into the room – piggy back, as a train, frog jumps, stepping stones.

Resources needed: *Just yourselves*

Why this activity helps: Signals the start of the Theraplay session, brings you together.



Activity 2

Check-Ups

Check your child brought their big smile to play, check they brought their ears, did they bring wiggly toes or still toes? Go through lots of body parts.

Resources needed: *Hand cream*

Why this activity helps: Spending time to check in with your child makes them feel special. Use the hand cream to help to sooth and calm them before the session starts. Connection through playfulness.



Activity 3

Hand Stack

Take it in turns to put your right and left hand on top of each other until your hands are up to the level of the child's face. You could use the rhyme 'one potato, two, potato' for the fist hand stack.

Resources needed: *Just yourselves*

Why this activity helps: This activity requires concentration and can be adapted to develop motor skills. It helps to build relationships by using touch and turn taking. For children who are not comfortable with touch you can leave a gap between



Activity 4

Foil Body Parts and Foil Robot

Use tin foil to make impressions of different body parts (make a robot glove with foil using your child's hand. Can you make them a robot leg by wrapping foil around their leg?) You can build up to a full robot body suit.

Resources Needed: *Roll of tin foil*

Why this activity helps: Helps child feel special, helps adult and child connect through play, helps regulation through touch.



Activity 5

La La Magnets

You and your child sit opposite each other with your hands together in the middle. Swing them from side to side singing 'la la la' then adult says a body part and you match them together (for example, thumbs, put your thumbs together like magnets / noses, put your noses together like magnets).

Resources Needed: *None*

Why this activity helps: Connection through play, adult provides structure, child follows adult's directions, eye contact, safe touch as part of an activity.



Activity 6

Sticker match

Use two sets of stickers, stick one on your child's nose (if they are comfortable with that). Ask them to make you match. Repeat until you both have lots of stickers matching. Check out how silly you look in a mirror together.

Resources Needed: *Stickers, a nearby mirror*

Why this activity helps: Helps connection through play, helps mirroring, helps eye contact and focus on faces



Activity 7

Row the Boat

Sit opposite each other and hold hands. Rock backwards and forwards as if rowing a boat. Sing the song 'Row, row, row the boat' as you rock backwards and forwards.

Resources Needed: *Words to the song in back of booklet.*

Why this activity helps: Helps connection through play, helps mirroring, great fun, increases pace of the session.



Activity 8

Bubble Pop

Blow a bubble and catch it on a wand. Playfully tell your child to pop the bubble with a particular body part, for example, little finger or toes. Then you can do this blowing lots of bubbles.

Resources Needed: *Bubbles*

Why this activity helps: Connection through play, movement for regulation, child follows adult structure.



Activity 9

Cotton Wool Painting

Using soft brushes or cotton wool again, pretend to paint your child's face / hand / foot. Ask them what they would like to be painted as. Talk about the pretend colours you are using. This too should feel relaxing and soothing.

Resources Needed: *Soft brushes or cotton wool*

Why this activity helps: Regulation through touch, adult offering soothing touch, child tuning into their senses.



Activity 10

Weather Report

Child sits with back to adult. Adult uses fingers to draw weather patterns on child's back – sunshine, rain, snow, lightening etc. You can also do a pizza with different toppings. You can take it in turns.

Resources needed: *None*

Why this activity helps: Sensory feedback, use of touch to help calm child, turn taking.



Activity 11

Feeding Activity

Sit closely with your child sharing a snack or drink. You could feed each other or feed your child. Listen for crunches or other eating noises. You could have a few different snacks, ask your child to close their eyes and see if they can guess which one they have been given (nuts, fruit, crisps etc). Listen to some calm music together.

Resources Needed: *Snacks / drinks*

Why this activity helps: Helps child feel special and feel the adult is meeting all of their needs. Helps down regulate.



Activity 12

Same Same Different

Adult does a move along with the instruction either 'Same' or 'Different' and the child has to either copy the adult action (same) or do a different move (different). This can include touch toes, standing tall, balancing on one leg, crouching down, arms up etc. You can make the child the leader if they like to have some control.

Resources needed: *None*

Why this activity helps: Good for getting children to follow adult direction and take guided control in a safe environment.



Activity 13

Blanket Wrap

There are variations on this. The higher energy version involves rolling the child in the blanket and then unrolling it carefully, so the child rolls out. The calm version involves wrapping the child in the blanket like a present and then pretending to unwrap it and notice them inside.

Resources needed: *A Blanket*

Why this activity helps: The child feels calm wrapped up in the blanket, it can energise them or calm them, they feel safe when wrapped up.



The activities suggested in this booklet are based on the Principles of Theraplay and are designed to help you connect and have fun together.

Theraplay is organised around 4 dimensions which are considered necessary for child development and for life-long resilience: structure, engagement, nurture and challenge.

For more information about Theraplay training, please contact:
educational.psychology@northtyneside.gov.uk

Pack prepared by Dr Amelia Taylor, Educational Psychologist and Certified Theraplay Practitioner and Trainer

Nursery Rhymes

Row, Row, Row Your Boat

Row, row, row your boat
Gently down the stream
Merrily, merrily, merrily
Life is but a dream

Row, row, row your boat
Gently down the stream
If you see a crocodile
Don't forget to scream

Row, row, row your boat
Gently down the river
If you see a polar bear
Don't forget to shiver

Row, row, row your boat
Gently to the shore
If you see a lion
Don't forget to roar

One Potato, Two Potato... (for Hand Stack activity)

One potato, two potato
Three potato, four
Five potato, six potato
Seven potato, more
Eight potato, nine potato
Count them up to ten
Let's put our potatoes back
And count them up again

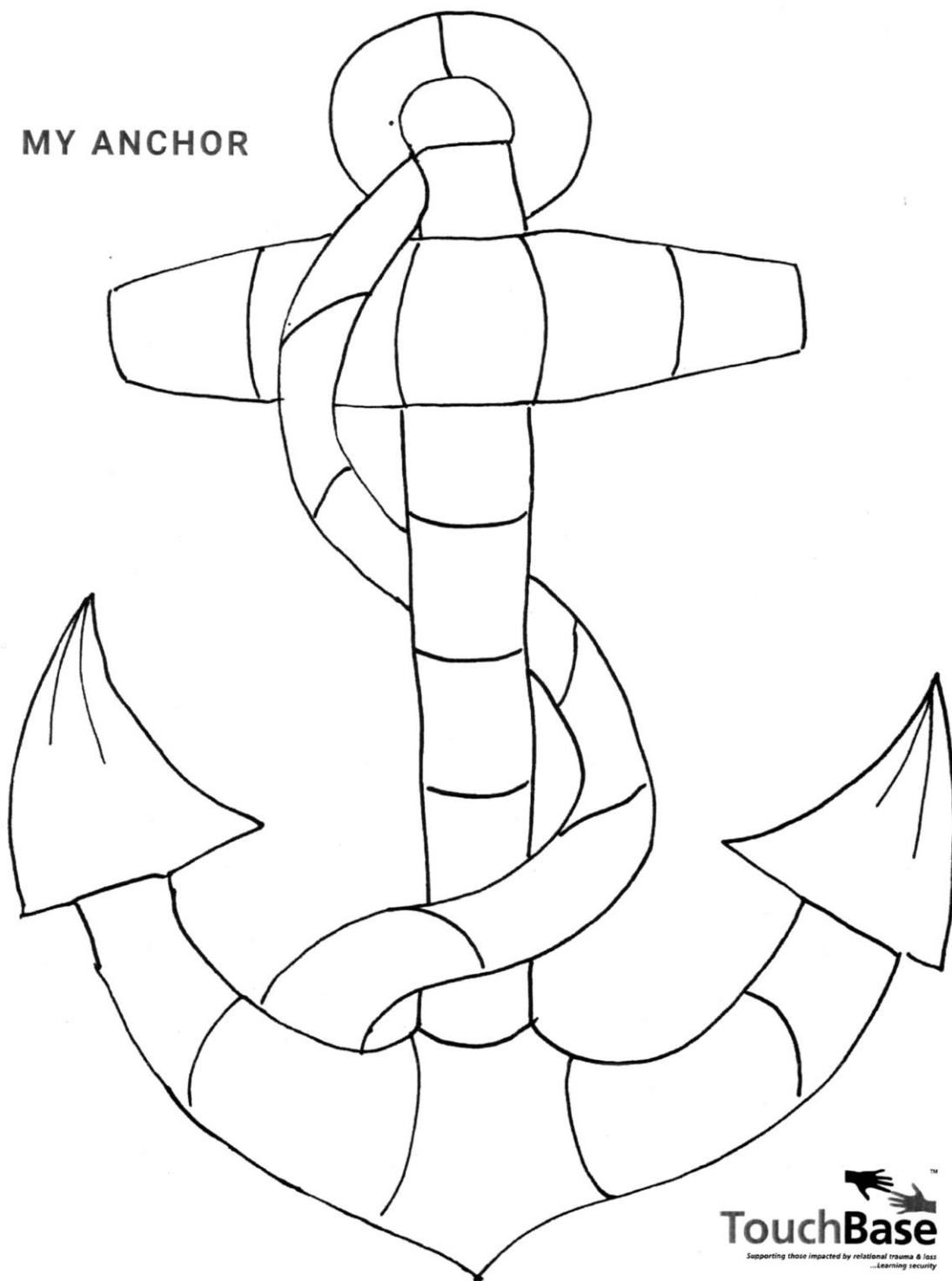
Self-Care Section

RESOURCING – all the things that are there to help you

Safe people you can connect with.
Pets or animals that make you smile.
Activities that leave you feeling warm inside.
Visualisations of safe, relaxing places.
Special memories that leave you feeling happy.
Exercise you enjoy.
Meditation.
Music that leaves you feeling calm or inspired.
Art or scenery that you love to look at.
Sounds that you love to listen to.
Breathing exercises that bring you back to your body.
Textures that you enjoy the feeling of.
Sensations you enjoy on your skin.
Favourite smells.
Favourite tastes.

ACTIVITY: Complete the anchor on the next page for yourself.
When you feel wobbly use your anchor!

MY ANCHOR



What Pushes my Buttons?

Things that push my buttons (make me lose control)

.....

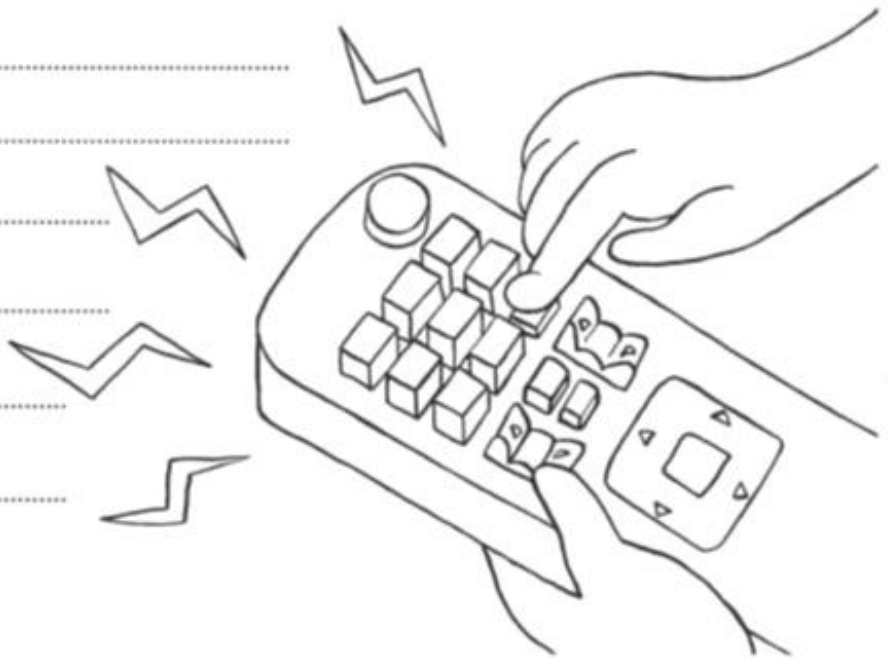
.....

.....

.....

.....

.....



The 'In Balance Together' training slides and this booklet were created using the Adoption Support Fund to support families during the Covid 19 pandemic.

The online training materials and this guide were made possible thanks to the following people:

Ailsa Hutchinson, Occupational Therapist

Amelia Taylor (and her fantastic daughter), Educational Psychologist

Wendy Jackson, Educational Psychologist

Jane Pickthall, Head of the Virtual School

And Greg Houghton, Multi-media Specialist

We hope you enjoy taking part in this programme and please get in touch for further support and advice.

HIVETeam@northtyneside.gov.uk

